

CCT311H5 F

Game Design and Theory

Summer 2026 Syllabus

Course Meetings

CCT311H5 F

Section	Day & Time	Delivery Mode & Location
LEC0101	Tuesday, 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM	In Person: IB 235
	Thursday, 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM	In Person: IB 235

Refer to ACORN for the most up-to-date information about the location of the course meetings.

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Course Contacts

Instructor: Brendan Allen

Email: brendan.allen@mail.utoronto.ca

Office Hours and Location: Available by appointment via Teams video call (see Quercus for link).

Additional Notes: When emailing, please include the course code (CCT311) in the subject line of your email.

Course Overview

This course provides an introduction to games studies. It reviews the history of games, from board and card games through to the latest digital games. It enables students to understand the medium of games through various lenses such as critical theory and ethnography. Students are introduced to the concepts of game narrative, the influence of technology in digital games, and the emergence of game paradigms such as casual games, serious games, game 'modding', and subversive play.

As a means of socially contextualizing contemporary game design, this course also introduces students to intermediary platforms of game production and distribution. Students will also enact and share their own developing theories of game design through their independent development of a small videogame.

Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will:

- Describe and critically analyze various games, their premises and basic gameplay.
- Define the formal elements of games including players, objectives, procedures, rules, resources, conflict, constraint, and state.
- Categorize game mechanics into meaningful conceptual and practical taxonomies.

- Define and explore the dramatic and narrative elements of games.
- Analyze and interrogate the nature of “fun” within games.
- Analyze the various types and functions of constraint within games.
- Research and respond to historic and contemporary games scholarship and journalism.
- Explore the platforms and social networks through which games are shared, bought, and sold.
- Identify roles of publishers and developers and name examples.
- Independently design a small videogame using Bitsy consistent with game design theory.
- Support peers’ videogame development through workshop-style critique and feedback.
- Use play testing in the iterative design cycle.
- Determine if a game is functional, complete, and balanced.

Prerequisites: CCT270H5

Corequisites: None

Exclusions: None

Recommended Preparation: None

Credit Value: 0.5

Course Materials

Readings:

As a throughline for our own frameworks of game design, we will be consistently reading and returning to the following text throughout this term:

Brian Upton. *The Aesthetic of Play*. The MIT Press, 2015. <https://doi-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.7551/mitpress/9251.001.0001>

We will also be conducting regular in-class game design exercises, using a selection of Anna Anthropy’s *Itsy Bitsy Exercises* as starting points. The full collection of these exercises can be found here:

Anna Anthropy. *Itsy Bitsy Exercises*. Itch.io. 2025. <https://w.itch.io/itsy-bitsy-exercises>

The Syd Bolton Collection at the UTM Library has generously made over 400 games available for our class this summer. We’ll be taking a class visit to the Collection early in the term and learning how to request materials and schedule play sessions in the Reading Room. I heartily recommend taking advantage of this excellent resource, especially if there are any historic games you would like to play and/or study that would be otherwise cost prohibitive to personally obtain. Early in the term I will circulate a list of games that the Collection has made available for us this summer.

Additional small readings and games will be assigned on a weekly basis, made available directly on our course’s Quercus page. Please see the schedule below for the order of readings. Some readings will require the use of the University of Toronto library system—all readings will be made freely available to UofT students.

Technology:

We will be using the free, web-based videogame tool **Bitsy** throughout this term. It is accessible on the web at <https://bitsy.org/>. There is no download required, and Bitsy works well on most contemporary web browsers.

We will also be creating and designing our own [Itch.io](https://itch.io) pages in order to share our games in progress and examine the work of contemporary small game developers. Itch.io is free to use.

Marking Scheme

Assessment	Percent	Details	Due Date
Attendance & Participation	10%	Attending class and participating in in-class activities and discussion.	Ongoing
Weekly Exploration Journal	15%	At the end of each week, students will submit a short journal entry (200-400 words) discussing a game design exploration of a videogame of their choice. These can take any form or genre, but should include two essential elements: 1. A discussion of the student's human and subjective encounter with the game's design principles. 2. An explicitly cited link or connection to a reading, course concept, or activity from the week in question.	2026-05-08, 2026-05-15, 2026-05-22, 2026-05-29, 2026-06-05, 2026-06-12
Analytical Essay	25%	Students will write a 5-7 page paper that examines their experiences while playing a game of their choice. Using theories from our course, students will analyze the game's design principles that informed their experience.	2026-05-19
Game Design Archeological Report	25%	Once in the term, students will choose new game unfamiliar to themselves and conduct an archaeological report about their gameplay experience. This short report will include the following items:	2026-06-09

Assessment	Percent	Details	Due Date
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A hand-drawn and labeled map of a specific space within the game. - A first-person narrative account of their initial encounter with the game (500-1000 words). - Textual and/or photographic evidence of their encounters within the game. <p>Note: This assignment may be submitted at any point in time during the semester as a replacement for one of your Weekly Exploration Journal entries.</p>	
Videogame Design Project: Bitsy	25%	Students will individually develop a small videogame using Bitsy, a free, web-based game design tool, that creatively applies course theories and concepts. Throughout the course, students will workshop their games in small groups. The final game will be submitted alongside a reflective analysis of the development process.	2026-06-16

Late Assessment Submissions Policy

A sub-session summer course moves quickly. This means that the timely submission of your work is necessary to ensure that we have enough time to read and respond to your work as well as provide you with useful feedback. That said, I also understand that the constrained nature of a sub-session can require flexible scheduling, especially for those of you juggling multiple courses. The following late policy is designed with this in mind:

- Assignments submitted on time will receive written feedback and a numerical/letter grade.
- Late assignments submitted within five days of the deadline will **not** receive written feedback, simply a numerical/letter grade (without penalty).
- Late assignments submitted after five days of the deadline will **not** receive written feedback and will incur a 10% penalty to the assignment’s final grade.

If you submit a late assignment and would like feedback and/or clarification regarding your grade, please request an office hours appointment with me to discuss your work directly.

Course Schedule

Day	Description
May 5	<p>Making Games and Thinking About Them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction - <i>The Aesthetic of Play</i> - In-class FlickGame game design workshop
May 7	<p>What is “play?” What is a “game?” What are "aesthetics?"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ch. 1 “Defining Play” – <i>The Aesthetic of Play</i> - Introduction to Bitsy
May 12	<p>CLASS VISIT: The Syd Bolton Collection at the UTM Library</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wood, K., & Carter, D. S. (2018). Art and technology: archiving video games for humanities research in university libraries. <i>Art Libraries Journal</i>, 43(4), 185–195. https://doi.org/10.1017/alj.2018.29
May 14	<p>Constraints, State, Flow, and Interactivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ch. 2 “Interactivity” – <i>The Aesthetic of Play</i> - Anna Anthropy – <i>Itsy Bitsy Exercises</i> – “The Wizard’s Tower”
May 19	<p>The Horizon of Action, Mapping Our Play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ch. 3 “Play Spaces” – <i>The Aesthetic of Play</i> - In-class exercise: Mapping a play space. - Practical strategies of videogame analysis
May 21	<p>Fun & Excitement, Boredom & Confusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ch. 4 “Heuristics” – <i>The Aesthetic of Play</i> - Anna Anthropy – <i>Itsy Bitsy Exercises</i> – “Shrine of the Sword”
May 26	<p>Waiting Our Turn</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ch. 5 “Anticipation” – <i>The Aesthetic of Play</i> - Guest Lecture: Dr. Christopher Young, Program Director, Archives and Special Collections, UTM Library
May 28	<p>It’s a Skill Issue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ch. 6 “Mastery” – <i>The Aesthetic of Play</i> - In-class exercise: Itch.io for game hosting and critical indexing.
June 2	<p>Learning Our Way Around</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ch. 7 “Understanding” – <i>The Aesthetic of Play</i> - Anna Anthropy – <i>Itsy Bitsy Exercises</i> – “Stock City” - Anna Anthropy – <i>Itsy Bitsy Exercises</i> – “Where’s My Key?”
June 4	<p>But What Have We Learned?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ch. 8 “Epistemology” – <i>The Aesthetic of Play</i> - Guest Lecture: Adrian Petterson, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Information, University of Toronto - In class exercise: Micro Game Jam Part 1
June 9	<p>Roleplaying and Alternative Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ch. 11: “Playing without Winning” – <i>The Aesthetic of Play</i> - In-class exercise: Spatial game design, the campus as play space
June 11	<p>Critical Play / Course Conclusions / In-Class Micro Game Jam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ch. 15: “Play and Meaning” – <i>The Aesthetic of Play</i> - In class exercise: Micro Game Jam Part 1
June 16	<p>End of class videogame showcase!</p>

Policies & Statements

Academic Integrity

The Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters states that:

The University and its members have a responsibility to ensure that a climate that might encourage, or conditions that might enable, cheating, misrepresentation, or unfairness is not tolerated. To this end, all must acknowledge that seeking credit or other advantages by fraud or misrepresentation, or seeking to disadvantage others by disruptive behaviour, is unacceptable, as is any dishonesty or unfairness in dealing with the work or record of a student.

It is your responsibility as a student at the University of Toronto to familiarize yourself with, and adhere to, both the Code of Student Conduct and the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters.

This means, first and foremost, that you should read them carefully.

[Code of Student Conduct](#) and the [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#) are available from the U of T website.

Religious Accommodations

Information about the University's Policy on Scheduling of Classes and Examinations and Other Accommodations for Religious Observances is at <https://www.viceprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/student-resources/rights-responsibilities/accommodation-religious/>

Declaration of Temporary Absence

Students who miss an academic obligation during the term (i.e., in-class assessment, quiz, paper or lab report) may use the ACORN Absence Declaration Tool to record an absence in one or more courses. Students may utilize this option once per term for a single absence period of up to seven consecutive days. The declaration period must include the day of declaration and may include past and/or future dates, for a total of up to 7 calendar days.

Use of the ACORN Absence Declaration does not require supporting documentation and should be used in addition to the missed term work policy outlined in the course syllabus. It remains the student's responsibility to initiate the process for missed academic obligations by following the instructions in the course syllabus.

Re-grading Term Work

A student who believes that their written term work has been unfairly marked may ask the person who marked the work for re-evaluation. Students have up to one month from the date of return of an item of term work to inquire about the mark. If the student is not satisfied with this re-evaluation, they may appeal to the instructor in charge of the course if the work was not marked by the instructor (e.g., was marked by a TA). Such re-marking may involve the entire piece of work and may raise or lower the mark. For more information on policies regarding re-marking of term work, please refer to [Re-marking Pieces of Term Work in the Academic Calendar](#).

Accommodation for Missed Tests and Late Assignments

Students must use the new [UTM Special Consideration Request \[Pilot\] application](#) for all ICCIT courses.

Students in **CCT109H5, CCT110H5, CCT111H5, CCT112H5 and CCT208H5** should always follow the Special Consideration Request (SCR) process outlined below. Students in other classes should follow the process below only if they are seeking accommodation for tests or assignments worth 20% or more of the final grade. Students in other classes seeking accommodation for tests or assignments worth less than 20% should contact their instructors directly.

Reasons for special consideration could **include**:

- Accident
- Illness
- Emergency procedure
- Bereavement
- University-sponsored athletics/competitions
- Compulsory legal duties e.g. (jury duty)
- Religious accommodations
- Disability accommodations

Reasons for special consideration **do not include***:

- Pre-planned vacations or social commitments
- Transportation delays
- Technology malfunctions
- Time management, course loads Course conflicts, team work conflicts
- Misreading a deadline/timetable
- Late course enrolment
- Scheduled elective medical appointments

* For these situations, refer to your course syllabus and speak directly with your instructor.

You have **three days or 72 Hours (including weekends)** from the assignment deadline or date of the missed test/quiz to **complete the SCR process in full**.

The first time in the semester that you are seeking accommodation, please complete the following steps:

1. Login to [ACORN](#), and click on Profile & Settings from the left-hand menu.
2. Click on Absence Declaration.
3. Record each day that you are absent – as soon as it begins up until the day you return to campus for classes or other activities.
4. Login to the [UTM Special Consideration Request \[Pilot\] application system](#) and complete the required steps. Documentation is not required.

For all subsequent times that you require an accommodation, you should only login to the [UTM Special Consideration Request \[Pilot\] application system](#) and complete the required steps.

Documentation is not required, however, it may be requested after the SCR has been reviewed.

On your SCR form, please attach a screenshot from Quercus showing the assessment title and deadline. This will help us process your SCR accurately and avoid any misunderstandings.

Important note about missed makeup tests: As stated in the [Academic Calendar](#), "If the student

is granted permission to take a makeup test and misses it, then they are assigned a mark of zero for the test unless the instructor is satisfied that missing the makeup test was unavoidable. Students are not automatically entitled to a second makeup test."

If you are registered with Accessibility Services, and the reason for missing a test or a deadline pertains to a disability, you are still required to submit an SCR at the link above. In such cases, the department will accept documentation supplied by Accessibility Services. If you require further information, please speak with your Accessibility Services advisor.

Further details regarding SCR policy are available here:

<https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/iccit/students/student-resources/policies-procedures/special-consideration-requests-scr-late-assignments>.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or Accessibility Services as soon as possible. Accessibility staff (located in room 2240, Student Services Hub, Davis Building) are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations. Please call 905-569-4699 or email access.utm@utoronto.ca. The sooner you let us know your needs the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

Code of Student Conduct

All students are expected to adhere to the Code of Student Conduct ([Code of Student Conduct \[July 1, 2025\] | The Office of the Governing Council, Secretariat](#)).

University of Toronto Mississauga Library Statement

University of Toronto Mississauga Library. The UTM Library (UTML) is located in the Hazel McCallion Academic Learning Centre (HM). [Open](#) seven days a week, UTML welcomes you to the Information Commons where our public services staff and [liaison librarians](#) offer individual walk-in research assistance, in-person or virtual appointments, workshops, and programs such as the CCR-accredited Library 101 session series focused on helping you develop the information literacy skills you need to excel in your coursework. Visit the UTML [website](#) to find online books, journals, databases, [research guides](#), [special collections](#) and more information on [on technology-enriched library spaces](#) such as the [Digital Exploration Lab](#) and the [Outer Circle Recording Studio](#).

Use of Artificial Intelligence

The use of any and all forms of artificial intelligence as a means of generating work submitted on course assignments is **comprehensively prohibited**. Additionally, I strongly discourage all students from using AI tools throughout the thinking, writing, and/or editing process of any course assignment.

If you are concerned about how this policy may impact your scholarly practices, I earnestly welcome you to reach out to me directly—I would be very glad to brainstorm alternative strategies with you.